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SUBJECT: FM SHALOM TO CODEL DREIER ON THE PALESTINIANS,  
SYRIA, IRAQ, IRAN, AND THE TRAVEL ADVISORY

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom told CODEL Dreier that the situation is better than 3-4 months ago because Mahmud Abbas is more moderate than Yasir Arafat. He also opined that "something is happening" in Egypt, Jordan, Libya, and Lebanon, and concluded that these countries want to be on the side of the United States. Shalom predicted that Hizballah will try to paint a picture of a new civil war in Lebanon, but said Syria must leave regardless and must disarm the group. On Iraq, he said he hopes the coalition will succeed so that democracy will spread to other countries in the region. He warned that Iran will have the knowledge to build a nuclear weapon in six months, and must therefore be stopped. Shalom also requested that the U.S. at least change the level of its travel advisory to Israel if it is not going to cancel it. End summary.

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Things Are Looking Up  
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12. (C) Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom told CODEL Dreier on March 28 that he believes progress can be made with the Palestinians. He opined that Mahmud Abbas is "much better than Arafat" because his statements are more moderate, he has reduced incitement on the television and radio, and he has stopped the firing of missiles to Israel. He mentioned, however, that Abbas has not yet made a strategic decision to dismantle terrorist infrastructure. Incitement still exists in textbooks, and the Palestinian Authority has not shut down factories, labs, and tunnels, nor confiscated illegal weapons. Shalom said Abbas can and should fight terrorist infrastructure because otherwise he will be putting the future of peace "in the hands of terrorists."

13. (C) Shalom continued that, regardless, things are better than 3-4 months ago, and Israel lately has seen visitors it had not seen in years. He explained that at the recent opening of Yad Vashem, for example, 41 delegations came from all over the world because they believe "something is happening." Shalom said this does not relate to just the Israelis and Palestinians, however. It also relates to Saddam Hussein being gone, Muammar Qadhafi changing his attitude, Yasir Arafat dying, and the Lebanese asking for freedom. He explained that Egypt and Jordan have returned their Ambassadors after four and a half years, that the Jordanian Foreign Minister recently visited, and that Israel is negotiating with Oman, Qatar, Morocco, and Tunisia to normalize relations with the GOI. Shalom concluded that "many want to change to be on the good guy's side, the U.S." He cautioned the delegation, however, to be careful with extremists like the Palestine Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Hizballah, Syrian, and Iran, who will undermine progress with the Palestinians and Lebanon.

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Resolution 1559  
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14. (C) On Resolution 1559, Shalom opined that Syria will have no choice but to disarm groups like Hizballah. He said that although Syria has done bad things, such as helping Hamas and Hizballah, undermining stability in Iraq, and sheltering Hussein's cronies, the most important thing right now is to get it out of Lebanon. Shalom predicted that Hizballah will try to paint a picture of instability and a new civil war, but this is because it is afraid to lose control and of being disarmed by a new Lebanese government.

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Iraq  
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15. (C) Shalom commented that Iraq looks unstable, but he said he hopes that it can overcome the difficulties it faces. He said there are rumors that a Shia regime will bring more religion to the people, but he said he believes Iraq and Sistani are different from Iran. Shalom told the CODEL that he wants the coalition to succeed in Iraq so that other countries in the region will move to democratic systems.

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Iran  
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16. (C) Shalom warned that Iran is "still trying to build its bomb," and that it has only agreed to a temporary suspension, not a cessation of development. He explained that September 11 has shown terrorism is not just a problem in Israel, and everyone should be concerned about Iran's weapons with ranges capable of reaching Madrid, London, and Moscow. Shalom said Iran must be stopped because it will have the knowledge to build a nuclear weapon in six months. He suggested that the IAEA have a special session prior to its scheduled session in June, otherwise Iran will not have an incentive to stop its weapons development.

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Travel Advisory  
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17. (C) Shalom reminded the CODEL that 13 congressmen recently wrote a letter to Secretary Rice asking her to cancel the travel advisory for Israel. He said the time had come to bring a positive signal to the peace process, and canceling the advisory would be such a signal. Shalom requested that if the U.S. does not cancel the travel advisory, it should at least change the level.

18. CODEL Dreier cleared this cable.

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KURTZER